

Labor Strikes

1903 + 1934

Kevin W. Lafferty
period 2

Friday, March 20, 1903

A report is in circulation that Jackson Miners' Union has forwarded a request to the leading officials of the Western Federation of Miners at Denver, Colorado, for permission to declare a strike. The supposition is that the mine in the immediate vicinity of Jackson are the objects of this attention. It is difficult to see how strike order would affect mines here as but few Union members are in the employ of these mines. However, the operators believe that if the issue is to be pressed, it might just as well be forced now as any time. We do not know whether the report that the organized miners are anxious to strike is true or not. It is significant, however, that while this rumor is afloat here, the news come from San Francisco that the miners of Amador and other mining sections have perfected a strong organization to resist any demands that may be made for recognition by any branch of the Western Federation of Miners. They are determined to manage their properties without dictation on the part of employees. They are willing to pay the highest wages possible, and treat the men with all consideration, but they will not surrender their right to employ whom they please, whether union or non-union. The organization is backed with \$300,000 capital, and more if necessary. All the mines in Amador County with few exceptions, are represented in the counter combine. Organization begets organization. The situation is the logical outcome of the organizations employees.

Friday, April 17, 1903

A Strike Declared

All mines of Jackson District under the ban of W.F.M.

The much talked about strike came to a head on Monday morning. All kinds of opinions have been indulged in for several days before the eventful time came as to what would come to pass. It was well known that the strength of the miners' union in actual members employed at the several mines in this neighborhood was not great. But the question of what effect a strike declared by the union would have upon those not identified with the local organization was an entirely different question. This was the vital point. Would the non-union men continue to work in face of the strike. If they surrendered with the rest the matter would assume a very serious phase for the motherlode mines. Sunday night the union held its usual weekly meeting. That was supposed to be the time when the report of the committee appointed to serve the demands upon the superintendents would be made.

Early Monday morning notices were posted around town, and in the vicinity of the mines concerned, to the following effects:

Strike Notice-Notice is hereby given to all men of Jackson district that a strike is declared on all mines and mills of Oneida, Zeila, Guin, Kennedy, Central Eureka, and South Eureka mines.

M. W. Moor, of W.F.M.
W.D. Ould, Pres.

At the change of shift at the mines maned, delegations of union men went to the mines, not in large bodies, but in squads of two or three, and intercepted the men as they were going to and from employment. They were stationed too at all trails and roads leading to the works. Webb Smith, Superintendent of the Kennedy, and J.H.Hampton, Superintendent of the Oneida, objected to the invasion of the grounds by the strikers-or rather the union forces who were determined to inaugurate a strike. Most of the employees were persuaded to turn back. So we were interviewed at the Kennedy works. The superintednent told the men that they would be protected while on the premises or at work. This was not broad enough for the men. They were informed that if they worked they would be blacklisted by the union. No actual violence was indulged in. The leaders were shrewe enough to tell the men to wvoid demonstrations of violence, to refrain from carrying weapons, promises of good behavior were made to the officers. Never the less the impression was conveyed that the path of safety lay in quitting work. Practically all lthe underground toilers of the Kennedy, Central Eureka, and South Eureka quit work. Many did so simply because they saw the others turning back.. All through the day the ranks of the union forces were swelled by new members. Common rumor says that 40 new men joined Sunday night; Monday over 100 were said to have joined. Their initiation fee of \$3, it was said, would be raised to \$10 in a day or two. Whether the men were promised support from the funds of the federation we do not. Rumors are current on both sides of the question. Seeing the success of the move to get the men out, it is not surprising that there was a strong accession to the union side.

Next came the report that N.P. Williams and other carpenters on their way to work at the east shaft of the Kennedy had been met by a body of strikers and turned back. Also, that E. B. Brown, engineer of the Kennedy old shart, had been stoppped on his way home from shift, and intimidated, resulting in stoppintg the hosting of water, and preparations for closing the shaft. This news, although not surprising to many, struck the community as a thunder clap. It meant the beginning of the end. It appears that a mob of strikers, about sixty in number, stopped Williams and others. M.W. Moor was spokesman. In the case of Brown, he met ten or twelve union men strung out along the Kennedy grade. He was on horseback, as his home is near Scottsville, and he rides to and from his work. He was asked to join the union, and refused. Then he was told not to go to work; that that would serve them as well as becoming a member. Finally he was informed that it would be better for him not to return to his work. Coming in this way he naturally interepred the language in the nature of threats. He rode back to the Kennedy office and reported what had occurred. Told the superintendent that he would rather throw up his job than have to run the risk of violence in the distance of serveral miles that he had to traverse in riding to and fro. Mr. Smith, the superintendent, said he could not blame him for feeling that way; that it was not necessary to report for work in the evening as he had received word from the officers to plank down the shaft. He was honorably discharged. Men were sent down the mine to gather up the tools to that end.

Oneida Mine, April 20, 1903

T. K. Norman,
Sheriff of Amador County

Sir:-

On April 16th the Oneida Gold Mining and Milling Company, acting together with other mining companies in this district, notified and informed you, in writing, that its Mine and Mine Plant had been closed by a strike ordered by the Jackson Union, and that the members of said Union were threatenig violence to its employees and destruction to its properties, and the Oneida, with said other companies, therefore demanded that you at once appoint a sufficient number of deputies to protect its men and mines and on your failure to do so you and your bondsmen would be held responsible for all loss and injury sustained.

Notwithstanding this notice and information you replied on April 18th by saying that you had no official information and in fact, no information or knowledge of any infraction or threatened infraction of the law within the limits of Amador County by any member or members of the Jackson Union, or by anyone; and notwithstanding that nearly every one of the employees of the Oneida Gold Mining an Milling Company had before said time been coerced into quitting their work at said Mine by members of said Union, you expressed congratulations the the mining companies affected by the strike upon the peaceful and orderly conduct of affairs.

I am at a loss to understand what you mean by "official information"; you have been advised that it is as much your duty to prevent the commission; the Oneida Gold Mining and Milling Company has a large amount of money invested in its Plant, therefore it is informed and beleives that its property stand in peril and therefore insists that it is entitled to have the same protected by you; you certainly have information and knowledge of threatened infraction of the law because the notice of April 16th, 1903, expressly gave you such information.

Section 4176 of the Political Code of California provides that the Sheriff must "First: Preserve the peace; Second: Arrest and take before the nearest magistrate for examination all persons who attempt to committ or have committed a public offense."

Section 4453 of the Political Code provides: "every municipal corporation is responsible for injuries to real or personal property situated within its corporate limits done or caused by mobs or riot"; you certainly know that Amador County is a municipal corporation within the meaning of this act.

As Sheriff of this county it seems that you ought to use all reasonable diligence to protect the county and its taxpayers from this liability; you ought the indulge in extra caution on the side of safety. If those supporting the strike in good faith intend to maintain it only by lawful means they can surely not object to your taking adequate measures to protect all parties concerned. You cannot be heard to say that you are without funds to provide for all requirements, because you have been assuffed that all funds necessary would be forthcoming and at your service.

I do not assume to even suggest to you who you shall appoint as deputies, but leave that matter entirely to your own discretion and judgement, insisting only that a

critical condition has arisen to meet which it is your duty to make prompt and adequate provision.

(THIS NEXT PART WAS DAMAGED DUE TO THE AGE OF THE DOCUMENT THE REMAINING IS AS FOLLOWS), Mine has been maliciously and wantonly out in two and rendered useless.

Again I demand that you afford the Oneida Company, its property and employees, prompt and adequate protection.

Signed: E. Hampton
Superintendent Oneida Gold Mining
and Milling Company.

Oct. 4, 1934

Mines Close as Union Votes to Call a Strike

The mines were closed by their management following a call for a strike for Thursday by the members of the Mother Lode Local No. 48 of International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers. Estimate place the number of idle men at 600.

Sunday, September 30th, the union members voted 137 to 135 to strike with the following Demands: An increase in wages based upon a sliding scale according to what the government pays for gold; recognition of the union; no discrimination against union workers, and a six hour day. The miners also ask that the hours, wages, and working conditions be submitted to a Board of Arbitration, consisting of three members, namely: first, a representative of mine operators, second, one member representing organized labor, and third, any fair minded disinterested party.

The demands of the union were received by the mine operators rather suddenly and notice for the immediate cessation of mining operations were posted at the Argonaut and Kennedy mines and later at the Central Eureka at Sutter Creek and the Original Amador at Amador City. The mills at the different mines are closed. Production of the new cyanide plant is still progressing. Thus far, no other mines in the county have been affected.

The various mine operators have issued statements in regard to the situation here. Ernest Stent, vice-president of the Argonaut Mining Co., and Webb Smith, superintendent of the Kennedy Mining and Milling Co., in a joint statement issued Tuesday said: "The union has made demands with which the companies cannot comply."

W. P. Henry, president of the Central Eureka Mining Co., stated that the mine would remain closed until the demands which the union submitted would be withdrawn. "This so-called union has only a very few miners from our mine as members. Most of our employees are old workers and are satisfied. We do not expect any trouble from any of them."

"Our workers are loyal but they, as well as the mine management, do not desire to work under strike conditions or unrest. The Union leaders are mostly newcomers from other countries. There is a strong communist element in the background."

"The Central Eureka is paying the highest wages in history. The wages are \$4.00 a day for muckers and \$4.50 for miners, all the cost of operations will permit."

Henry declared that he believes the same conditions apply to the other mines affected. Only 137 men voted for the strike and 135 against, a total of 172 men. The Central Eureka employs 130 men. The Argonaut and Kennedy Mines employ approximately 600 men and less than 50 are employed at the Original Amador.

In San Francisco, E. C. Hutchinson, president of the Kennedy Mining and Milling Co., stated that he doubted whether the strike vote represents the majority of the workers. The Union according the Hutchinson, was formed just recently, and he told newspaper representatives that he did not know much about it. "Our mine alone employs 165 miners, so the strike does not seem to represent any large proportion of the men." The Kennedy mine will not operate during a strike, was Hutchinson's statement, because he did not want anyone to get hurt. President Hutchinson declared that the Kennedy has done nothing but

help keep the county going with payroll and taxes. "We have about 165 permanent jobs, but what little extra money the advance in the gold price has meant is being put back into the building of the new cyanide plant, which made our local payroll go up to 210."

The rise in gold price, according to Hutchinson did not mean extra profit in gold but simply meant that the mines can operate on low-grade ore, something they could not handle at the former prices. He said: "We have kept our men at work while we were in the red and we have tried to treat them right."

On Wednesday morning, Secretary L. R. Colton of the Union issued a statement following those made by the different mine operators. His statement is as follows: "We feel that the statements made by the officials of the companies are not correct. E. A. Stent, vice-president of the Argonaut Mining Co., and Webb Smith superintendent of the Kennedy Mining and Milling Co., said that the union demands were unfair."

"The part of the union's demands that the mine operators consider unfair is that they do not want to abide by the law of the United States Government in recognizing our union for collective bargaining. The majority of our 423 members are old-timers in this community. The president and another officer of our local union was born in Amador County."

"At the Argonaut Mine, Monday, October 1st, 1934, when the day shift crew reached the surface, they were notified that there would be a lockout starting the following morning. The executive and strike committee met immediately and decided to strike. We prevented the night shift from going to work. Although we did not know it at the time, the company intended to move all equipment and supplies from the lower levels. The strike affected the four largest mines in Amador County. We also called out all employees of the three other mines. Apparently this action was exactly what the mine operators wanted, an excuse to show the union was unfair."

"William Sinclair, of the Kennedy Mining and Milling Co., immediately complained that we had not given them time to move their equipment and supplies. We presume that they had expected to do so that night. They are not willing to have our demands submitted to a Board of Arbitration consisting of three persons, with a representative of the mine operators as a member of the Board. So it appears that our demands must be fair."

Thursday, December 13, 1934

Notice

The mines affected by the pending strike have concluded that if the strike is longer continued the only course open is to close the mines down indefinitely. Realizing the serious effect this will have on the community, the mines will give their former employees an opportunity to return to work. Those miners and employees who want their jobs back on the same basis as formerly will apply prior to December 17, 1934 at the respective mines either in person or by written applications and as many can be reemployed in starting the mines up again will be taken back, provided enough apply to make it practicable to resume operations. Otherwise the only alternative is an indefinite and complete shutdown.

Argonaut Mining Company, Ltd.
Kennedy Mining and Milling Company
Original Amador Gold Mines

February 7th, 1935

Community Organization of Amador County is Launched

New Organization in First Meeting, Starts Move to Bring About End of Strike

Will Be Permanent Body to Further Welfare of This County and Protect Its Interests

At a meeting of the representative citizens of the county held Wednesday evening, February 6th, in Jackson, a community organization of Amador County was formed. The new organization is known as the "American Protective League of Amador County." Every citizen of the county at heart should join this laudable association and help the good cause along. Applications for membership may be signed with any member of the executive committee.

The League's "Articles of Association and Declaration of Principle," state, in part: "The purposes for which this association is formed are: To protect labor; To protect employers; And above all, to protect the general public of Amador County. Broadly the purpose of the association shall be the general welfare and/or to provide a medium for the expression and application of public opinion in Amador County.

"labor is the most important factor in the welfare of any community. The condition of Amador County today is a potent exemplification of this fact and, yet, there is no greater subject of exploitation than labor. It has been exploited by capital, and it had been and is today being exploited by the very organizations which pose as being its benefactors. This is all because of factional organization, which shall have for its purpose the bringing about of cooperation between labor and capital to mitigate the egotistic spirit which now dominates industrial and capitalistic organizations, ad to engender that spirit of altruism which is the very essence and foundation of true democracy."

Thursday, February 28th, 1935

Kennedy Mine Opens Friday With Small Crew; 150 Men Await Jobs

Supervisors Adopt an Ordinance to Limit Quantity of Men for Duty on Picket Line

Mines continue Operations; Alleged Rioters Are Held to Answers in Court

The welcome whistle of the Kennedy Mine sounded Friday morning after the mine had been closed since October 1st, 1934, by the strike called by the Mother Lode Miners'

Union. The Reopening of the property marks the return to operations of the last of the four mines closed by the strike. Of these four, the Central Eureka at Sutter Creek resumed limited operations after an agreement to arbitrate their difficulties with the union had been made. The Argonaut Mine in Jackson and the Original Amador in Amador City have been operating without recognition of the Union, and now the Kennedy has fallen in line.

On the opening day, William Sinclair, foreman at the Kennedy Mine, reported that ten men assembled to work in two shifts in hoisting the water. Sinclair states that there will be no difficulty in securing men to work, as over 150 men have already signed up with the company. At the present time, the unwatering of the mine is rapidly progressing, but no statement has been made regarding the time the actual production will start.

Thursday, June 6th, 1935

Meanwhile, site leaders declared the developments in the strike were more hopeful than at any time during the strike. In a statement, president D'Ambrosio of the union claims that fewer men are reporting at the Argonaut for work and that the union has no fears of the Kennedy Mine reopening. D'Ambrosio claims that there were 557 union men employed in the three mines before the strike and of these not more than ten have returned to work.

During Friday evening, Edward D. Vandeleur, president of the California Federation of Labor, announced at the union meeting that if Jackson merchants would not end their persecution of the miners, the state body would open a commissary. The statement criticized the merchants as being impatient because there has been no union labor pay checks since last October.

During the meeting, the union men were addressed by George Kidwell, president of the Bakery Drivers' Union of San Francisco, William Casey, president of the Bakery Wagons' Union of Sacramento, and A. E. Stephens, Sacramento Council. All assured the miners that California labor will continue to lend support until the strikes ended successfully.

Arrests in labor unrest Friday were brought to fourteen when Manual Duran of Jackson was taken into custody on a warrant sworn to by Ernest Marchechi, charging him with assault.

According to strike headquarters, Monday of this week, the striking gold miners increased their pickets at the Amador to 200 union members.

At a special session Monday, the Amador County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance restricting pickets in strikes to a maximum of ten people, these to be people who had work at the place being picketed prior to the time of the strike. Each picketer must wear a badge of identification.

Regardless of the new law, Attorney A. J. Harder of Sacramento claimed that any ordinance limiting the number of pickets is and would be unconstitutional.

Thursday, November 21, 1935

Union No. 48 Calls Off Strike At Kennedy; No Understanding I Reached With Others

Announcement was made the latter part of last week that the thirteen-months-old strike at Kennedy Mines had been settled. The statement was made following a conference between president George Wilson of the local union, L. R. Colton and A. J. Harder, union representatives, William Sinclair, new superintendent of the Kennedy Mining and Milling Company, and Sheriff George Lucot.

According to the settlement, the mining company will not recognize the union and the wages will be the same as paid at the time the strike was called on October 1, 1934. Superintendent Sinclair stated that no men employed would be discharged and that union men would be hired as needed without discrimination.

President Wilson of the union declared that the union had agreed to settle the strike with the Kennedy because of the company's promise of "no discrimination" and the fact that working conditions in the mine are much improved.

The decision of the union means that the strike which started a year ago the first week of October, is now half settled. No agreement has been attained as yet with the Argonaut and Original Amador. According to Wilson, when these agree to the same understanding as that of the Kennedy, the strike will be called off.